1: Bowen-Jones et al. K-5 (1955-1958) 1961
EZ6 Malta EZ6

B. The Lands of a Maltese Family

423*
173
427
596

It has been found possible to trace the landholding history of a single family back to its very beginning through four generations and slightly more than 100 years. Before about 1850, the family in question had no direct proprietary interest in land. Its members were landless labourers working mainly in the fields of various farmers in the northern districts of the island. They appear to have moved from farm to farm as demands for labour arose. Frequently they worked as a team, occasionally as individuals but always they were paid on a daily basis. Their home was in the casal of Mosta, and there is still some attachment to that centre, although few members of the family continue to reside there.

This study is based, fundamentally, on the oral tradition of the family, refined by studies of the Farm Register, Government Land Records and field identification. For ethical reasons, the family must remain anonymous; its members are therefore referred to by key numbers. The founder-father of our family and his five children are designated 0 to 5 as below. The progeny of each son are numbered similarly, the digits suffixed to the parent's number and so throughout. In addition, the lineage groups stemming from the original five children are distinguished by the letter A to E. Final suffixes 0 denote husbands of the females of the family. [27] [128]

The history begins in the 1850's with a family of five children and their father (0). Four of the children (2-5) were sons and worked for some time with their father as farm labourers. At some stage, the daughter (1), married a farmer with land in the Manikata area, and from her springs branch A of the family. Later, one of the brothers (2) married the daughter of a farmer who held most of his land at Gnejn Ghajn Tuffieha, and lived nearby. On the death or retirement of his father-in-law, 2 acquired the tenancy of this land in the third year of an eight year lease which had commenced in 1862. Finding that he was unable to work this farm satisfactorily by himself he invited one of his brothers (3) to join him in the enterprise. When the eight year lease was renewed for a similar period, in 1870, both brothers became joint tenants. Their respective descendants form groups B and C of the genealogy. Another piece of land, which had been leased by 2's father-in-law for 99 years from 1851, passed to 2, neither 3 nor his descendants having any share in it.

Meanwhile, in 1857 or 1858, the father (0) and his two remaining sons (4 and 5) acquired the tenancy of an area of partially irrigable land at the head of the Gnejna valley. Some 12 months earlier the land, with its terraces, had been severely damaged by floodwaters following very heavy rain. The landowner concerned was unwilling to assist the sitting tenant in the repair of severe storm damage to the extent which that tenant expected. Rather than bear alone the full cost, the latter attempted to sub-let outside his own family and was dispossessed by the owner. Our landless labourer (0) and his two sons (4 and 5) evidently felt themselves capable of tackling this reconstruction and, with the landowner's approval, took over the tenancy. It is uncertain whether the landlord gave them assistance in the form of reduced rent, whether they had some capital saved from their meagre wages which they could exploit here, or whether they depended for success entirely on their own labour. Some capital must have been available to them to cover the period of reconstruction and the sale of the first season's crop. It would be characteristic of the period if some financial help was given by the *pitkali* merchants who functioned as the land bank of that day. [426]

There is evidence that local opinion did not rate highly the chances of this landless group in restoring the valley to its former fertility. The story is told of local comment that the family would not stay 'from Christmas Day to St. Stephen's' (25th-26th December). After 100 years of continuous occupation the story affords the family some considerable amusement, but serves to illustrate the shaky nature of the original enterprise. [522]

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

ALL FOOLS' DAY

1st. April

This particular day has been selected for playing off little tricks whereby ridicule may be fixed upon unguarded persons, especially the younger sort. 527 522.

The favourite jest in Malta, on the 1st. day of April, is to send some one upon an errand for something grossly nonsensical, who is sent home in a state of bewilderment as to what the affair means. The joke is carried so far as to send letters making appointments in the name of persons who, it is well known, must be absent from the house at the time fixed upon, and the laugh is always in proportion to the trouble given.

When the person falls into the snare the term "Leuuel ta April" (the first

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

527 of April) which amounts to "April
522 fool" is applied with laughter.

527 The custom of sending one upon a
522 bootless errand on the 1st. of April is
174 perhaps a travesty of the sending hither and thither of our Lord from Annas to Caiphas, and from Pilate to Herod. It is possible, however, that it may be a relic of some old heathen festival.

It is conjectured that April day is celebrated as part of the festivity of the New Year. That day used to be kept on the 25th of March, and it is certain that the commencement of the New Year, at whatever time that was supposed to be, was always esteemed a high festival, and this was the case both amidst the ancient Romans and with us. Now great festivals were usually attended with an octave—that

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

is, they were wont to continue for 8 days, whereof the first and last were the principal; and you will find the 1st. of April the octave of the 25th of March, and the close or ending consequently of the feast. Hence it is supposed that the 1st. day of April became a day of extraordinary mirth and festivity, especially among the lower classes who are apt to pervert and make a bad use of institutions, which at first might have been very laudable in themselves.

A writer in "Poor Robin's Almanac" for 1760, gives the following metrical description of the modern fooleries on the 1st. of April, with the open avowal of being ignorant of their origin.

"The 1st. of April some do say
Is set apart for all Fools' day,
But why the people call it so

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Nor I nor they themselves do know.
But on this day are people sent,
On purpose for pure merriment,
And though the day is known before
Yet frequently there is great store
Of these forgetful to be found
Who are sent to dance *Moll*
Dixon's round.
And having tried each shop and stall
And disappointed at them all
At last some tells them of the cheat,
Then they return from the pursuit
And straight way home with shame they run
And others laugh at what is done,
But 'tis a thing to be disputed
Which is the greatest fool reputed,
The man that innocently went
Or he that him design'dly sent."

This custom of imposing upon each other on the 1st day of April, and sending one another upon frivolous, ridiculous and absurd errands, whatever be its origin, appears to be universal throughout Europe.

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

In France one thus imposed upon, on the 1st of April, is called "un poisson d' Avril," in England such a person is called an "April fool," in Italy "un pesce d' Aprile" and in Scotland a "Gowk."

It is curious that the Hindoos practice precisely similar tricks on the 31st. of March, when they hold what is called the "Huli Festival."

During the "Huli festival" when mirth and festivity reign among the Hindoos of every class, one subject of diversion is to send people on errands and expeditions that are to end in disappointment and raise a laugh at the expense of the person sent.

The "Huli" is always in March and the last day is the general holiday.

Colonel Pearce in his "Asiatic Researches" proves this to have been a cus-

7: Busuttil I, Y-4, 5 (no date) 1894
EZ6 Malta EZ6

tom, from immemorial time, among the Hindoos. The least inquiry, however, into the ancient customs of Persia, or the minutest acquaintance with the general astronomical mythology of Asia, would have told Colonel Pearce that the boundless hilarity and jocund sports, prevalent during the "Huli Festival" in India, have their origin in the ancient practice of celebrating with festival rites the period of the vernal equinox, or the day when the New Year of Persia anciently began (*)

ASCENSION DAY
Lapsi

The Maltese celebrate Ascension day by parties and picnics on the water.

(*) Maurice in his "Indian Antiquities."